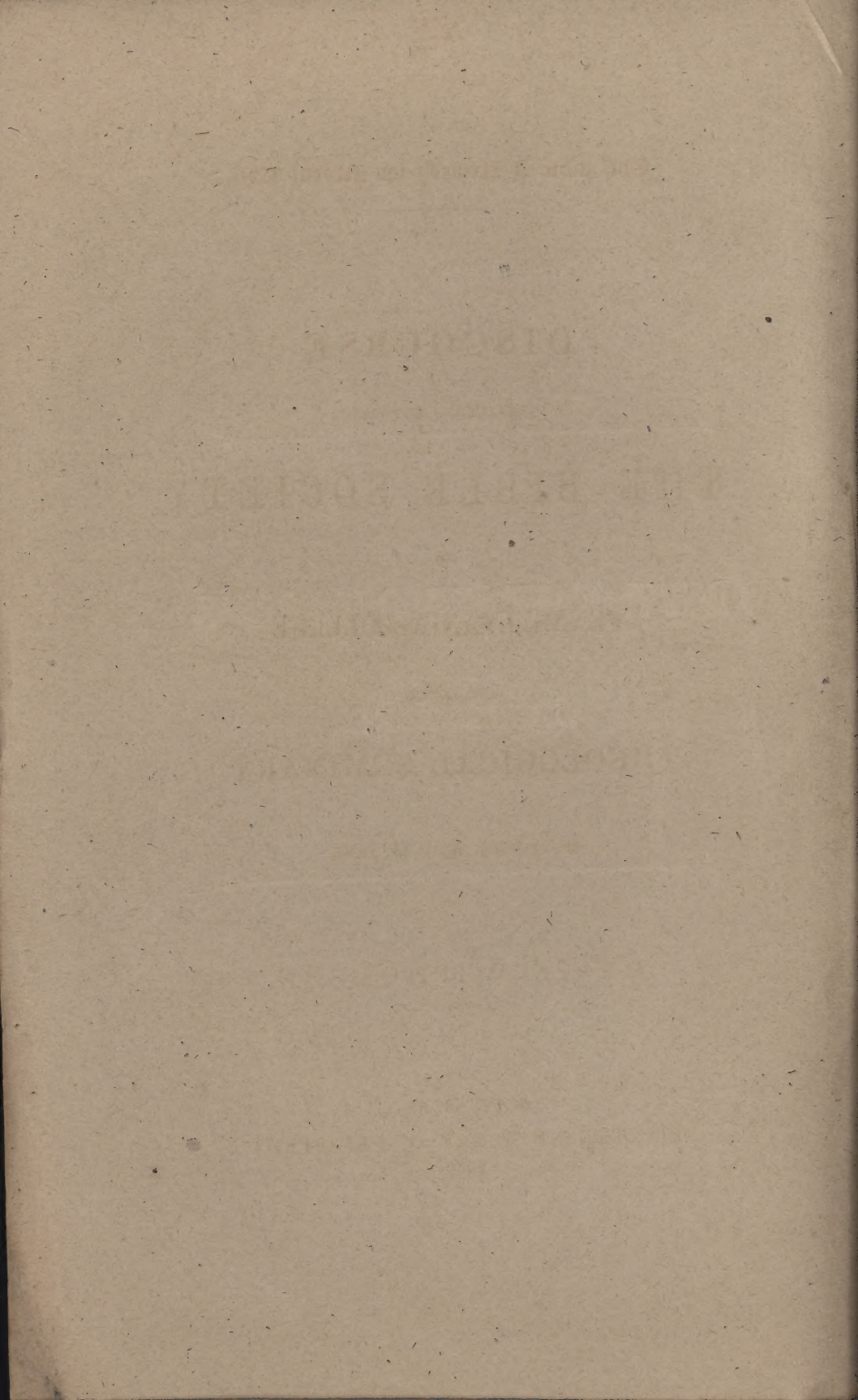


---

REV. C. W. THOMSON'S

DISCOURSE.

---





The Bible A Remedy for Moral Evil.

---

A

## DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE BIBLE SOCIETY

OF

PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE

AND OF THE

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,

Gettysburg, April 14, 1856,

BY

REV. C. W. THOMSON,

OF YORK, PA.

GETTYSBURG :

PRINTED BY HENRY C. NEINSTEDT.

1856.

THE BIBLE AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

# DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

THE BIBLE SOCIETY

OF

PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE

AND OF THE

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Gettysburg, April 14, 1863.

BY

REV. C. W. THOMSON.

OF THE

GETTYSBURG

PRINTED BY HENRY C. REINSTEADT

1863



## DISCOURSE

PENNA. COLLEGE, April 15th, 1856.

REV. AND DEAR SIR:

The members of our Bible Society are grateful to you for the kind services you rendered them, on the occasion of their recent anniversary, and have instructed me to solicit a copy of your discourse for publication.

Allow me to add that your compliance with the request will much oblige

Your friend,

M. L. STOEVER,

President of the Society.

REV. C. W. THOMSON.

GETTYSBURG, *April 15th*, 1856.

MY DEAR SIR:

Were I to consult my own inclination, I should rather be disposed to commit my discourse to oblivion, as a production hastily arranged, and intended to answer an occasional purpose; but if you think its publication may in any way benefit the cause to which it relates, I suppose I must yield my own judgment to that of my friends. The copy is therefore at your disposal, and with sincere desires for the prosperity of your Society,

I am very truly yours,

C. W. THOMSON.

PROFESSOR STOEVER.



## DISCOURSE.

---

THE present, my friends, is an age of enterprise. All the industry and energy of which man is capable, seem enlisted in the development of those resources which the arts and sciences have placed at his disposal, and in the furtherance of every project which can, in any way, add to his individual convenience, his social advantage, or his domestic comfort. Improvement is the order of the day—a thousand means are devised, of which our ancestors never so much as dreamed, both in the more minute, and in the grander machinery of life, to facilitate our labors and promote our ease. In husbandry, in mechanics, the march of mind goes on, and diminished exertion suffices, and increased aggrandizement results, and matter is brought into a subjection, that shows itself in a train of luxuries, which must have required a large imaginative organization to invent. Over the whole face of the land we see the evidences of this advancement. Fleets of steamers dash forward on our rivers, and long tracks of railroad find their way over our mountains; nay, we may now say, *through* our mountains; for the order of the day is to penetrate, rather than to mount, and the men of science, tunnelling the rocks of the hills, have, in these times, reduced the figure of Shakspeare to a simple verity, as “into the bowels of the land” they now “march on without impediment.” By these facilities of intercourse, those who formerly thought themselves widely sundered, are now brought into near neighborhood and communion. Even the trackless ocean, which receives “no furrow from the keel” that parts it, is no longer that mighty barrier between land and land, which it was once esteemed; but in less than one little fortnight, gives communication between its distant shores. The triumphs of philanthropy are, in like manner, vast and abundant. They shine in the improvements in prison discipline, in the establishment of schools for the education of the

poor, in the foundation of hospitals and asylums, and retreats for all classes of the helpless and needy. No path is unbeaten by the cheering footsteps of benevolence. She walks abroad in the great highway of the world, scattering everywhere her soothing and ameliorating influence; and she goes quietly and unostentatiously (but not the less acceptably to Him who looketh at the heart) into the shady and secluded glens, and the dark and obscure alleys; into the mud cottage, and the even less attractive city hovel; and there, with a voice that is only echoed in heaven, she gives the word of comfort and consolation; and with a purse that is never drawn before human eyes, she administers to the necessities of the unfortunate and the suffering. O! there are some saintly souls up and down in this world, bad as it is, whose excellence will never be known till the great day that uncovers all secrets; but it is greatly through these, that the pure cup of comfort is yielded to the lips of wounded and suffering humanity.

But while such an engrossing interest is excited by the achievements of science and the progress of art, while such an active care exists (and God be praised that it *does* exist) for the temporal wants of men, it is one of those singular inconsistencies which sometimes take hold on mankind, that their more important, because more enduring interests, should be neglected, and that the very remedy, which of all others, is best suited to the wants of our fallen nature; that remedy which is calculated to produce not only present, but eternal advantage—I mean the distribution of the holy Scriptures—should be passed by with an indifference so marked, so cold, by the generality of men, as to savor strongly of contempt. We call the Bible the word of God; and yet who, observing the neglect with which it is treated by so many of earth's inhabitants, would for a moment suppose that they deemed it to be given by inspiration, or to contain the revelation of His will concerning mankind? Who would for a moment suppose that it afforded the only knowledge they can possess respecting that future state of being, to which they are every day rapidly tending? It would seem, my friends, as if there were a little taint of infidelity at the bottom of all this. Did men really and solemnly believe that the Scriptures were the only guide through time into eternity; the only safeguard through the wilderness of this world; did they believe that they were the power of God unto salvation, because



*they only* reveal his chosen plan of redemption from sin, how much more deeply would they estimate their worth; how much more diligently would they seek for their hidden treasure; and how much more ardently would they desire that their imperishable riches should be scattered through the world. But alas! very many look upon the Bible too much as a common book; and while "with brute unconscious gaze" their eyes are bent on earth and earthly things, they lose the bright glimpses of eternity which it displays; they hear not those songs of praise of which it tells; they feel not those refreshing breezes, which come through its portal from that glorious tree of life, fast by the throne of God, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

We read in Oriental story of a certain prince (I think it was, for it is a long time since I perused the tale), to whom a benevolent fairy gave a charmed ring, which was to serve as a talisman to preserve him from evil, by uncomfortably pressing his finger, whenever he was tempted to do anything wrong. It is a fanciful story, but not without its instructive meaning. The eastern fable is here realized. We have a talisman in this holy book, the Bible, whose preserving power is full, perfect, and effectual; which is able to keep us, not only from many of the evils of this world, but, by God's grace, from all the terrors of the next; and which holds out to us, as a double incentive to right doing, the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. And should we withhold this blessed talisman from those who are walking amid the thousand dangers of this world's wrongs? Ought we not rather to labor, and strive, and pray, until every man, woman, and child on the face of God's earth is armed with this mighty panoply; until every one holds in his hand the pure word of truth, which is able to make him wise unto salvation. The soldier, of whom I have somewhere read, whose life was saved on the field of battle by carrying a Bible in his bosom, which a bullet partly pierced, knew the worth of the book in regard to his temporal welfare. And think you it is not equally available for the salvation of the soul from that second and more grievous death, which sin has entailed on our ruined nature? O yes! if it is taken to the heart in love, if it is received as an earnest of God's good will to a rebellious world, which he would fain induce to repent and return, it is impossible to describe the power it possesses to subdue

the force of wrong principles and wrong feelings; to calm the tumult of unbridled passions; to soothe the fierceness of unhallowed temper, and to bring the whole spirit into a subjection so complete, and yet so gentle, that he who feels its influence shall acknowledge he has then only known the sense of a true and unembittered joy. It is a talisman which preserves from evil. There has seldom, if ever, been found a diligent, sincere, and unprejudiced reader of the Bible, who continued on in a steady course of sin; either the Bible has expelled sin, or sin has expelled the Bible; the man has either abandoned the one or the other, at least to a great degree. If this be true—and I believe it will be found to be so—think what a glorious change would be wrought in the moral condition of mankind, if every man had his Bible, and read it to this practical advantage. What an overthrow would at once be effected of some of the chief causes of human misery; and what a mighty addition would be made to the sum total of human happiness! Is not this single thought enough to warm thinking men to action? Is not the regeneration of their race an object to be desired and promoted? Who can be found to object to such a proposition? Let none, then, be indifferent and cold on a subject so everlastingly interesting. "He that is not with me is against me," was the language of the Savior, in regard to moral reformation. If you really love the cause of the Redeemer, you must wish to see its principles prevail, speedily and universally, especially when you consider that they are essentially connected with the eternal condition of the souls of men. You owe them your best endeavors for their dissemination; you owe your exertions to your fellow-men for their salvation. There is a mighty torrent of iniquity sweeping over the land, bearing away on its troubled surface the lovely and the beautiful, to a ruin that must last forever. The deluge of sin is rolling up the waves of condemnation and wretchedness around a large portion of the human family, and they know not where to find the ark of safety. Thousands, even in this enlightened age, when, as we have seen, science walks in strides, and art flies with the wind, when research dives deep, and brings to light hidden mysteries, of which former ages never dared to dream, even in this day of discovery, this time of progress and development, this opening of the flood-gates of human information, thousands are yet perishing for lack of the knowledge of those things



that concern their salvation. They hold themselves aloof from the *means* of knowing, and will not seek afforded opportunities for spiritual instruction. What multitudes there are to whom a church interior is a place unknown, to whom the voice of domestic prayer is an uncommon sound, and to whom the leaves of the Bible are as a dead letter—as the pages of a sealed book in a foreign tongue. They are living and dying in brutal disregard of the most momentous truths. They are going down to the grave without the only hope that can make the grave a resting place, lacking that which is most necessary for this life and for that which is to come; miserable here, and with every prospect of being miserable hereafter. When the ignorant and the wretched are thus presented before you, will you pass by on the other side, and overlook their wants? Will you give a sidelong glance at them, perhaps heave a sigh for their condition, and go on to the prosecution of your own pursuits? Will you stand heartlessly, and see them perish, without an effort to save them? O let them have your endeavors and your prayers! Give them the bread of heaven in their misery; give them the Bible, that they may live.

But perhaps there may be some here to-night, who think themselves mere outside observers; who imagine that they have no part or lot in the matter, and that they are not personally interested in the subject we have been endeavoring to recommend. Such are making a grand mistake in the view of their position, for in neglecting the welfare of their fellow creatures, they are neglecting their own. He who commanded that we should love our neighbor as ourselves, meant us for social beings; he has bound us together by a tie which we are not authorized to sever, and his intention is, that our social relations should be productive of reciprocal advantages. They are designed to react upon each other, and if we interfere to prevent such reaction, we are doing violence to the harmony of God's ordainings. If we refuse our neighbor instruction, we make ourselves liable to all the results of our neighbor's ignorance. If one of those results be crime, it is a serious consideration, and one for every indifferent man to ponder, how far we may be chargeable with the guilt. Let no one, therefore, suppose that he is not interested in this matter; let him not suppose that he can be excused from the personal responsibility that attaches to it; for his duty to his neighbor forbids the excuse. The Bible is to be

disseminated ; let every one here come to the work ; let him come to the aid of this Bible Society ; let him take his part in this glorious enterprise, and make it his province to know that every household within the range of his influence is, by this means, supplied with the word of God.

But this is not all—we may go a step farther, and perhaps be excused for making here a single suggestion. The Bible must be read as well as possessed, or it will be of little use. It is not the mere paper, and type, and binding, which make up the book, that can suffice to save men's souls. There must be a careful perusal, a drinking in of the thoughts wrapped up in those words that lie between its covers, in order to render it an effectual means of good. And here I am afraid too many will stand condemned, when it is considered, even among those who read it habitually, how coldly and reluctantly they often come to the duty. The fact is, we are too apt to read it *as a duty*, rather than a privilege, as a service that we owe rather than a blessing that we are to receive. Some indeed there are, who, though they keep it on their tables, decorated with ornamental gilding, seldom see anything but the outside of the book. And they call themselves Christians too, and profess to believe and be guided by what they seldom or never read. O how many a Bible shames its owner with its unopened leaves, and tells him, if he would but hear, of the precious treasure he is hiding away in the napkin of his own culpable neglect ! He cannot know, for he does not seek them, the comfort of its promises, and the consolation of its hopes, under trial, and sorrow, and bereavement ; but he can know, and he does know, that the revelation of God was not given to be despised. There is no apology for him, unless he finds it in the plea of his own impenitence, and that is the very reason he ought to apply to it the more earnestly.

But there may be those to whom the reading of the Bible presents its difficulties. The hard-working man, who has little time to spare from the constant avocation necessary for the support of a numerous family, and to whom a defective education renders reading at all times a labor ; or the poor invalid widow, whose want of health prevents her from what she would consider her delight ; these have a reasonable and an available excuse, and they ought to be helped. Were it not worth a thought, whether some good might not be effected by the foundation of societies to encourage the



reading of the holy Scriptures, the members of which might meet together, and in the fellowship of a good cause, render the perusal doubly interesting, when seasoned by the sweets of social intercourse, or, scattering themselves abroad by twos and threes, might visit the tenements of the poor and the illiterate, make their Bibles more attractive and more useful, by the power of a chaste and cultivated elocution, and so lead them on to love God's word, and to prize it as their directory to the happiness of heaven. It has appeared to me that something might be done in both these ways, and I merely throw out the idea as a subject for future reflection. At all events, means ought to be taken to promote the general reading of the Bible, or our best efforts in its behalf are, in a great measure, thrown away. It is in vain that copies are multiplied and distributed; it is in vain that money is expended for its more free and general circulation; it is in vain that it finds its way into every habitable corner of the universe, unless men can at last be brought to a serious and thoughtful perusal of its contents.

The low state of public and private morals at the present day, is a fact too evident to be denied. It is one of those signs of the times, which must make every thinking man more thoughtful, and awaken him to a sense of the important events they betoken. It shows itself in the chicaneries of trade; in its irregularities and its false estimates of honesty, which consider deception justifiable, when it can be practiced undiscovered, and with an expectation of gain. It shows itself in the plans resorted to by commercial houses in our large cities, to win custom and secure patronage; plans, in the prosecution of which, it is thought necessary that young men connected with mercantile establishments should frequent, and even reside at, hotels, exposed to the temptations of intemperance, and every other vice, for the purpose of meeting with, and making a profit out of, merchants coming from a distance, and that they should accompany these to gaming houses, theatres, and brothels, or any other sink of iniquity and vice they choose to propose, or which it may be thought acceptable to propose to them. There can be little question that the ruin of many a lovely young man, especially of those who are annually sent uninitiated to our large cities, from the quiet scenes of your rural districts, is effected in this manner. And yet this human immolation, this worse than heathen sacrifice, this fearful hazarding of immortal interests, is

practiced by men, moral themselves, and of unblemished reputation, and, strange to say, even by those who profess and call themselves Christians. My blood almost boils at the thought of these hellish offerings to mammon, and I cannot restrain myself from asking the question, do these men read their Bibles? One would almost doubt the fact. If they did, methinks they would stand in more awe of that inquisition for blood, which will one day be made in reference to those entrusted to their charge and brought within the range of their influence.

Again, the low state of public morals is shown in the field of politics. There we behold men who would revolt at the insinuation of a departure from truth and honesty, resorting to every species of fraud and deception, every sort of bribery and corruption, for the purpose of supporting the interests of party, and sometimes even using language, and bringing charges against their opponents, which the courtesies of refined society will not sanction, much less the requirements of christian charity and good will. The abuses of an election ground, where the arcana of private life are ransacked, and character is torn to tatters, are often too scurrilous for a decent man to show them any kind of allowance; and yet, such is the state of public feeling, that decent men do pass them by unimproved, and sometimes even rejoice in the effects they produce. And these results of wrong are not unfrequently carried out in our halls of legislation, where ungodly men, elected by such means, show their unhallowed dispositions in words and acts, and sometimes in public measures, that disgrace our country, and stain our national reputation. I would not be thought improperly severe, but many of you know, I doubt not, that this is but the melancholy truth.

Once more, the moral delinquency of the day is exhibited in the increasingly open desecration of the Sabbath. In our large cities (for it is there that we must look for the working of society, and find the full development of principles), in our large cities we may see many of the stores and places of business partially, or wholly open; the saloons and houses of refreshment with widespread doors; men often secretly *at work*, or lounging in their shops and counting rooms, while the churches are deserted, and many of their seats left vacant, multitudes going forth on their Sunday excursions, to disturb the quiet of the neighborhoods



whither they resort; parents often taking their children with them, who do not forget this early instruction, and soon learn to practice upon it for themselves; in some places theatres open on Sunday night, and largely frequented; in our large cities we may see all this and much more winked at and permitted by authority, sometimes almost encouraged. And when we witness such scenes, grown so common that they cease to surprise, can we for a moment doubt that the *majority* (must I say?) of those engaged in them, are utterly unmindful of the solemn command of God, "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day?" Can we for a moment doubt that there is a sad lack in the state of public morals? Did we want every other evidence, it is fearfully set forth in our daily newspapers. Every day they bring us some new instance of the deep depravity of our fallen nature; some fresh recital of the progress of crime, murder, defalcation, riot, debauchery, until we almost nauseate over the revolting details, and until the soul of every thoughtful man sinks within him, fainting and sick

"—— with every day's report

Of wrong and outrage with which earth is filled."

If public morals be thus deteriorated, it would be hardly fair to expect that private morals should be flourishing. The unblushing exhibition of many of the vices of society, but too plainly shows how great must be the mass of corruption that is hidden beneath the covering of a fair and goodly seeming. O! could the habitations of some great metropolis in our land be unroofed, could you take in at one view, the scenes which are at this moment transacting in all its obscure and secret places; could you stand upon some elevated platform, and look down upon the unveiled mysteries of the evening hours, you would be astonished and shocked at the magnitude of the social evil before you, of which you had perhaps formed but a faint conception. In the broad glare of *day*, amid the private and secluded haunts of a condensed population, the course of iniquity proceeds with abundant strength and rapidity; but in the stillness and darkness of the night, when the curtain of obscurity veils the earth and the heavens, and when man thinks his fellow will not observe him, the orgies of wickedness are kept up with increasing spirit, and with all their fascinating accessories. The lamps of the gaming table are lighted, to show the

unwary the road to ruin, and the music of the theatre gushes out in strains of melody, and the hall of revelry resounds with the loud laugh of inebriety, and the obscene jest of the debauchee. Then hies forth the thief to his plunder, the drunkard to his dram, and the "strange woman" to her horrid trade of ensnaring simple youth, who will not listen to wisdom. These things are mostly hidden from general observation; but when we consider that the eye of God, to whom "the darkness is no darkness at all, but the night as clear as the day," when we consider that He looks upon all this just as it is, and takes in the whole at a single glance; and then reflect that in mighty contrast to these scenes of depravity, his great attribute is holiness, is it not wonderful that his wrath is not visited on a world so lying in wickedness? Is it not amazing that "his tender mercies are renewed every morning?"

It may, perhaps, be said that these remarks do not apply to this community; and we trust they do not, to any very large extent. But let it be remembered that almost everywhere "the town has tinged the country," and that many of the same vices are to be found in smaller places, though in a less degree, according to the smaller population. Human nature is everywhere the same, and although in a town like this, profligacy is not so marked and magnified, still the root of bitterness lives beneath the moral soil; and the fruits of the unregenerate heart will more or less be seen. They may be modified and kept down by circumstances, but yet the same evil plant is there.

Now it is evident that for this state of things some remedy is required. What shall the remedy be? This brings us again to our starting point, and furnishes an answer—the Bible. Could we but bring this mighty agent to bear upon the moral delinquencies of the times, they would vanish before it, as the mists before the rising sun. The shades of error cannot stand when fully exposed to the rays of divine truth. Make a man, as I before remarked, a devout reader of the Bible, and it will be an extraordinary thing, if he does not, to a great extent at least, abandon his sins, and pursue a course of piety. It is the most powerful means of moral reformation which the world contains; all others, apart from this, are but secondary, and comparatively feeble. As auxiliaries, they have their worth and use; but the Bible must be first; and the religion of the Bible, if ever the world is reformed, must be the



grand, the paramount agent by which that mighty end will be accomplished. It has claims then, upon a christian community, which are not to be resisted. Do you wish to see the society in which you live purified and regenerated? Do you desire to have the friends who are dear to your hearts safe and happy? Circulate the Bible! Do what you can to make the precepts of the Bible known and loved. Do what you can to advance the blessed day, when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

What a delightful, what a glorious scene would this beautiful world of ours present, if all men were living under the immediate influence of gospel principles. If to do to others as we would have them do to us, were to constitute the rule of conduct; and love to God and man were the motive on which our actions were based, if justice, mercy, and humility, were considered as the grand requirements of duty, if "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world," were the daily concern of every man's life, if to promote the best interests of humanity, temporal and spiritual, were the great object ever kept in view by each one of our race, how would those petty contentions and jealousies that so often mar domestic comfort, be forgotten; how would the mighty whirlwind of human passion that now defaces our social system, subside into the gentle breath of love; how would the deep and dark strivings of individuals and nations, which now break out into murder and war, be changed into the noble emulations of peace and mutual good will. What harmony and quiet would reign through our fields, and our forests, and our populous cities! What earnest endeavors should we see among men, to do each other good instead of wrong! What anxious desire would be manifested to advance the general welfare of mankind!

"O for a world in principle as chaste  
As this is gross and selfish! Over which  
Custom and prejudice shall bear no sway,  
That govern all things here, shouldering aside  
The meek and modest truth, and forcing her  
To seek a refuge from the tongue of strife,  
In nooks obscure, far from the ways of men—  
Where violence shall never lift the sword,  
Nor cunning justify the proud man's wrong,

Leaving the poor no remedy but tears—  
 Where he that fills an office shall esteem  
 The occasion it presents of doing good  
 More than the perquisite—where laws shall speak  
 Seldom, and never but as wisdom prompts,  
 And equity—not jealous more to guard  
 A worthless form, than to decide aright—  
 Where fashion shall not sanctify abuse,  
 Nor smooth good breeding (supplemental grace)  
 With lean performance ape the work of love.”

Would you not rejoice, my friends, in such a glorious and happy change as that we have contemplated? Are you not even now solicitous to aid in producing a “consummation so devoutly to be wished?” Take then your Bible in your hands; strive to live yourselves according to its precepts, and do what you may to induce in others a similar desire. Come to the help of this association, whose anniversary we celebrate; an association banded together for the best and holiest of purposes; give them the help of your personal efforts; give them the help of your pecuniary means; and having done that, give them also the help of your earnest prayers; labor with them in the blessed work in which they are engaged, and fulfil the important and pleasing duty which belongs to every immortal soul, of sending abroad those holy Scriptures, which are able to make men “wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

God is ready to work with you in his own cause. How wonderfully has he opened the door of the great empire of China, so impenetrably shut for long ages, for the entrance of the gospel; and he has even softened the Mahommedan heart, and taught it to feel with kindness and charity; and thus has enlarged the way for the forward march of the christian faith. And so will he prosper all efforts that are sincerely made towards the evangelization of the world. And wherever you take the Bible, you take the text-book of Christianity. And it operates like leaven; it produces its one saving effect; its influence spreads in widening circles; it leaves its mark upon individual souls, and through them it works outward and outward, until its final effect will be, that the masses will become imbued with its spirit, its principles will be made beautifully prevalent, and the prophesied day will be hastened on towards its glorious advent, when “the kingdoms of this world shall become



the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and when he shall reign forever and ever."

Only another word or two in conclusion. A solemn day is coming, my friends, when we must all make return of that which we have done, whether it be good or bad; when we must render an account of our stewardship here on earth, and show whether or not we have wasted our Lord's goods. Look forward in serious prospect to the judgment of that day, and consider how you will then most probably wish to stand in reference to the subject now before us. It may be closely connected, not only with your own happiness or misery, but with the eternal welfare of many of the immortal crowd which will then be gathered around you. There are a thousand sinister influences now at work, which go to hinder the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom; and so powerful and insidious is their nature, that they will require constant and combined Christian effort to meet and overcome them. Let your care be that you forget not your obligations; so that the malediction pronounced against a defaulter of old, may not come upon *you*. It was a deep and deadly anathema on neglected service, when the angel of the Lord uttered those words, "Curse ye Meroz, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." We would entertain, however, the better trust, that *your* duty will be faithfully discharged, and that in the day of righteous retribution, you may have the comfort of believing that you have done your part to give to the perishing souls around you a hope of everlasting blessedness.





